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FOR THE WELL-STOCKED KITCHEN

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Peppermint Bark

Makes approximately (40) 1.5" square pieces

December means peppermint season, and what better way to embrace peppermint than with rich, creamy bark. Made as one slab that can either be broken into irregular pieces, or scored and cut into specific shapes, this treat is ready to be delightfully packaged for your favorite people. Who knew four simple ingredients could taste so good?

Ingredients:

1/4 cup crushed peppermint candy canes (about 4 medium canes)
2 cups (12 oz) dark bittersweet chocolate (> 60% cacao)
2 cups (12 oz) white chocolate
1 teaspoon peppermint extract

Directions:

(1) Prepare a 9 x 13 low-rimmed baking pan by buttering the interior surface and lining with parchment paper.

(2) Prepare the crushed candy canes by placing the candy in a thick plastic bag. Cover the bag with a kitchen towel to minimize holes in the bag during crushing. Working on a cutting board, pound the candy with the side of a meat mallet (or hammer) until the candy canes are crushed to the desired consistency. Set aside.

(3) In a double boiler, or a heat-safe bowl over simmering water in a saucepan, melt the dark chocolate, stirring frequently. (Take care that no water touches or steam condenses on the chocolate – water will cause melted chocolate to seize.). When the dark chocolate is thoroughly melted, pour onto the prepared pan. Smooth the chocolate across the pan forming an even layer. Allow this first layer to cool to room temperature, then harden in the refrigerator for 30 minutes.

(4) Using a similar melting process, melt the white chocolate in a double boiler, or in a heat-safe bowl over simmering water, stirring frequently. (White chocolate melts at a lower temperature than dark chocolate; take care not to scorch the chocolate.) Once melted, stir in the peppermint extract, then pour over the chilled dark chocolate and spread into an even layer.

(5) While the white chocolate is still warm, sprinkle the crushed candy canes on top pressing gently into the top of the white chocolate layer. Allow the bark to cool to room temperature, then place in the refrigerator for another 30 minutes.

(6) Remove the bark from the refrigerator, and using the parchment paper as a sling, lift the chocolate layers from the pan. Break into pieces, or when at room temperature, score, and cut into squares. Serve, or package for giving.